

Random Thoughts . . .

MEMO

TO: *Students Who Are Disappointed
With Their Last Test Grade*

FROM: *R.M. Felder
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Dear Students:

Many of you have told your instructor that you understood the course material much better than your last test grade showed, and some of you asked what you should do to keep the same thing from happening on the next test.

Let me ask you some questions about how you prepared for the test. Answer them as honestly as you can. If you answer “No” to many of them, your disappointing test grade should not be too surprising. If there are still a lot of “No”’s after the next test, your disappointing grade on that test should be even less surprising. If your answer to most of these questions is “Yes” and you still got a poor grade, something else must be going on. It might be a good idea for you to meet with

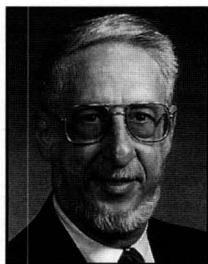
your instructor or a counselor to see if you can figure out what it is.

You’ll notice that several of the questions presume that you’re working with classmates on the homework—either comparing solutions you first obtained individually or actually getting together to work out the solutions. Either approach is fine. In fact, if you’ve been working entirely by yourself and your test grades are unsatisfactory, I would strongly encourage you to find one or two homework and study partners to work with before the next test. (Be careful about the second approach, however; if what you’re doing is mainly watching others work out problems you’re probably doing yourself more harm than good.)

The question “How should I prepare for the next test” becomes easy once you’ve filled out the checklist. The answer is . . .

“Do whatever it takes to be able to answer ‘Yes’ to most of the questions.”

Good luck,
Richard Felder



Richard M. Felder is Hoechst Celanese Professor of Chemical Engineering at North Carolina State University. He received his BChE from City College of CUNY and his PhD from Princeton. He has presented courses on chemical engineering principles, reactor design, process optimization, and effective teaching to various American and foreign industries and institutions. He is coauthor of the text Elementary Principles of chemical Processes (Wiley, 1986).

Test Preparation Checklist

Answer yes if you did these things regularly, not just occasionally.

Homework

1. Did you make a serious effort to read and understand the text? (Just hunting for worked-out examples exactly like the homework problems doesn't count.) ___ Yes ___ No
2. Did you work with classmates on homework problems, or at least check your solutions with others? ___ Yes ___ No
3. Did you attempt to outline every homework problem solution before working with classmates? ___ Yes ___ No
4. Did you participate actively in homework group discussions (contributing ideas, asking questions)? ___ Yes ___ No
5. Did you consult with the instructor or teaching assistants when you were having trouble with something? ___ Yes ___ No
6. Did you understand ALL of your homework problem solutions when they were handed in? ___ Yes ___ No
7. Did you ask in class for explanations of homework problem solutions that weren't clear to you? ___ Yes ___ No

Test preparation

8. Before the test, did you carefully go through the study guide and convince yourself that you could do everything on it? ___ Yes ___ No
9. Did you attempt to outline lots of problem solutions quickly, without spending time on the algebra and calculations? ___ Yes ___ No
10. Did you go over the study guide and problems with classmates and quiz one another? ___ Yes ___ No
11. Did you attend the review session before the test and ask questions about anything you weren't sure about? ___ Yes ___ No
12. Did you get a reasonable night's sleep before the test? (If your answer is no, your answers to 1-11 may not matter.) ___ Yes ___ No

TOTAL ___ Yes ___ No

The more "Yes" responses you recorded, the better your preparation for the test. If you recorded two or more "No" responses, think seriously about making some changes in how you prepare for the next test.

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